

Statement at October 13 Board of Education Meeting

-Chris Smithson, Southern Pines native, resident, and Councilmember

Just months after deciding to make the IB program at Southern Middle school-wide, the Board is now considering gutting the program at Pinecrest High School. Many concerned parents spoke at the meeting. Most spoke in favor of supporting the IB program. As I knew there would be many speakers much better versed in the advantages of IB, I decided to approach the Board's actions from a different angle.

Members of the Moore County Board of Education:

My name is Chris Smithson. I live in Southern Pines. I am a native of Southern Pines. I attended Moore County Public Schools. I also serve on the Southern Pines Town Council. I am not here to speak on behalf of the town, but I believe I speak for more than a few people.

When I last spoke to you, I asked you to save and expand the IB program at Southern Middle School. At that meeting, you wisely voted in favor of Southern Middle and the students. Now, as I understand it, the future, or at least the scope of the IB program at Pinecrest is under question. I urge you to continue your support of our students by fully supporting the IB program. Others here are much better versed in the advantages of continuing support for the program. They are doing a great job so I will not try to make the case for them.

As an elected official myself, I understand much of what you go through as a board. Most of the time, there are not many members of the public in attendance at meetings. When we do show up, we are usually here en masse for one particular issue. You are here because you care about your community and want to do your part to help. Sometimes the public understands the big picture and sometimes we do not. In the end, however, you are an elected body and are accountable to the voters of Moore County.

That brings me to the main reason I am here. Back in March when you voted on the future of Southern Middle's IB program, many were interested to know who supported the program and who did not. Unfortunately, as reported in both the Pilot and the Fayetteville Observer, the board does not keep track of who votes which way, using the excuse that state law does not require such recording of votes. If you read the Pilot or attend one of our meetings, you will know that every other elected board in Moore County records each member's votes.

Just because the law does not require this board to record individuals' votes, it does not mean refraining from doing so is right. You are not only responsible for educating our children, you are responsible for a portion of the County budget that is greater than the combined general budgets of Southern Pines and Pinehurst. When you include state funds, the County school budget is greater than the County's general budget, including funds for the schools. You have all this responsibility but no individual accountability. Yes, we can infer some of the vote results by noting who makes and seconds motions, but when you all

vote on the motion at once and do not record who votes which way, you are not letting the people who you work for- the public- know where you stand.

You are here because you care about your community and want to do what you think is right. Every vote you make should be a reflection of what you think the right thing is. Be proud of your vote and let the people know where each of you stands. Be proud of your vote and establish a record upon which the public can judge your performance. Be proud of your vote and do the right thing. Please vote individually and start doing so tonight.

Thank you for your time.